

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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MAN ON A LEASH

by Jack Ritchie

I GLANCED at my watch and frowned. "All right. I can give you ten minutes."

Renolds was a tall, sharp-faced man with yellow-brown burning in his eyes and he claimed to be one of the reporters on my newspaper. "The Journal," he said, "has functioned as a watchdog for the public ever since it was founded sixty years ago."

I selected a cigarette from my case. "You could have told that to my editor. He loves compliments. Get to the point."

His face told me that he was mentally skipping several paragraphs and finding a foothold closer to his subject.

"This entire county is metropolitan," he said. "And we have a quite competent police force of over 3,000 men. Yet we still tolerate the anachronism of a Sheriff's Department with its force of twenty-five deputies."

"If you've been reading the newspaper you're supposed to be working for," I said, "you might have noticed several editorials about that."

Renolds shrugged that off. "But simple duplication of law enforcement isn't the worst part of it. The entire Sheriff's Department is a political plum, a protection racket in uniform. It actually thwarts the regular city police in the performance of their duty."

He slapped his fist on his open hand. It made a small sound.

It has been rumored that should you scratch a newspaperman, you would find nothing below the surface but facts. Judging by those in this story, I would even be most reluctant to scratch the Miss in charge of "Letters from the Lovelorn."



MAN ON A LEASH

"We've got to do more than write editorials. We've got to split this thing wide open."

His face was darkish red, as though he harbored a permanent fever. "The Sheriff's Department runs the County Workhouse and we all know what goes on in there."

I lit my cigarette. "Perhaps."

He nodded. "Of course you do, Mr. Troy. It's Sheriff Brager's private mint. He gets rake-offs on the food and kick-backs from the guards. A prisoner lives like a dog unless he has a friend on the outside to slip him enough money to buy favors. The guards are cretins who stay on the job for the graft they can squeeze and for the beatings they can administer with a smile."

"There was an investigation about two years ago," I said. It came to nothing."

Renolds snorted. "All that the investigating committee had to go on were rumors. It had no concrete facts. Brager cleaned up the place in a hurry and kept it that way for the month it was watched. The prisoners were too scared to talk. Brager saw to that."

He paced the floor. "Kangaroo courts run rampant. Brager uses the prisoners as a private work force. When they aren't working on his estate or on one of his pet projects, he loads them on trucks and rents them out to big farmers at four bucks a head. He pockets the

money and they're lucky if they get a good meal out of it."

I leaned back in my chair and watched the cigarette smoke. "Apparently you intend doing something about it."

Renolds nodded vigorously. "I'm going to get myself arrested."

I examined my manicure. "For vagrancy, no doubt. You're going to write an inside story about your experiences in the workhouse. Good for you. See Frank Harrison. He's the editor of this paper and he's the man you should have seen in the first place. There was no need to go over his head. I regard my time as valuable."

Renolds held up a hand. "Mr. Troy, I plan nothing so simple. And I thought that the fewer people who knew about what I'm going to do, the better. And that goes for Mr. Harrison." A thin smile came to his face. "An exposé of conditions would make a good story, no doubt, but I intend to destroy the reputation of the sheriff and his department with something more final, more drastic."

Renolds' smile seemed to be self-congratulatory. "I am going to have myself arrested for murder."

"Whose murder?" I asked.

His smile increased by an inch. "Yours."

I shifted in my chair.

Renolds giggled slightly. "Of course I don't actually intend to murder you. I merely want it to look as though I did."

I relaxed. "Thanks," I said dryly. "But it's going to look like murder to Brager," Renolds said eagerly. "Don't you see it, Mr. Troy? Brager and his department haven't had a major case since anybody can remember. All they do, when they do anything at all, is to arrest a few speeders, pick up vagrants, and raid the shanties near the railroad yards for their work force. Then something big like this comes along and it's laid in Brager's lap. An important man is murdered and Brager has the confessed killer right in his own jail. He'll make the most of it. He'll see that his picture gets in all the papers. He'll take credit for everything."

Renolds paused dramatically. "And then the bubble bursts. He finds himself with no murder and no murderer. He fell for a fake murder and a false confession. The entire public's attention will be focused on him and once that occurs every rotten thing in his department will find an eager awake public demanding that something be done."

"Perhaps," I said. "But why choose me as the murder victim?"

"Because you're an important man, Mr. Troy. And we need all the publicity we can get. You own this newspaper, the largest in the state. You come from a nationally known family. Your father served in the Senate for over thirty years until his death three years ago. And now you are entering politics too;

following in his illustrious footsteps. You're running for governor, but everyone knows that the governorship is just a stepping stone to bigger things."

"You're sure about that?" I asked.

"Of course," he said. "Your future is unlimited."

I ground out my cigarette. "In other words, you want us to frame Brager?"

He shook his head fiercely. "I wouldn't call it a frame-up. Not when we're dealing with a man like Brager. We're performing a public duty."

I looked out at the skyline for a moment and thought tiredly of the half a dozen short speeches I was scheduled to make that day. I turned back to Renolds. "If you have any intelligence, you must realize that I couldn't participate in any scheme like that."

Renolds put his fingers on my desk and leaned forward. "In a sense, you won't be involved at all. I simply ask that you disappear for three or four days. Go on a hunting trip where there are no communications with the outside world. No radio, no television, no newspapers. And see that no one knows where you have gone or even that you decided to go."

His fingers left wet marks on my desk. "When you come back you will be shocked and horrified that the world thought you dead. You knew absolutely nothing about me or what I had done. I was simply

an opportunist who somehow discovered that you would be away and took advantage of that fact."

The entire scheme was ridiculous, but I felt a trace of curiosity. "Let's hear the details."

Caution veiled his eyes. "Do you agree to go along with me?"

"I'd have to know more about it first."

He shook his head. "I can't tell you more unless we come to an agreement."

I looked him over. "You must have a good reason for wanting to get Brager. Something more powerful than civic duty."

His mouth tightened and he said nothing.

I played with my smooth stone paper weight for a few moments and then looked up. "You'll have to give me a few days to think it over."

His face brightened with hope. "Certainly, Mr. Troy. I'll be back on Wednesday."

When he was gone, I took my private elevator down to the fourth floor. Frank Harrison's office was crowded when I entered. I waited fifteen seconds while it emptied and then took a chair.

Harrison brushed steel-gray hair away from his forehead. "All business stops when the owner makes his appearance. How long has it been since you've been down here? Two weeks?"

"I understand we have a reporter named Renolds," I said.

He nodded. "What about him?" "You tell me."

He rapped ashes from his bulldog pipe. "He's one of the best men I have. When I assign him to something he covers it from front to back. He's the sharpest digger for hidden facts that I know of."

"What's wrong with him?"

Harrison's eyes flicked to me in sudden surprise. Then he almost shrugged. "There's hate burning inside of him for Brager. He works on it whenever he has time. Probably he knows more about Brager than Brager does himself."

"Why?"

Harrison seemed reluctant, but he spoke. "Renolds came to me from San Francisco about a year ago. Naturally I wondered why a top-notch reporter should suddenly pull up stakes and move across the country. So I checked on him."

I waited.

Harrison tamped new tobacco into his pipe. "Last year Brager attended a sheriff's convention in San Francisco. With him it wasn't business. We all know that. Just one big drunk. One evening his car ran over and killed a four-year-old kid. The boy was Renolds' son."

Harrison's eyes went to the half dozen men marking time outside the glass walls of his office and then back to me. "Brager got a fast lawyer and maybe a few other hands got some of his money. Some witnesses testified that the boy ran out from between two parked cars.

The same witnesses said that Brager was sober. The cop who did the arresting disagreed, but Brager got off."

He met my eyes. "Got any special reason for wanting to know?"

"Curiosity."

Harrison shrugged. "Which means it's none of my business." He folded his hands and looked at me. "I just can't figure you out."

"It isn't necessary."

He smiled slightly. "I get the feeling that there's something been riding you ever since you took over the paper."

I rose to go.

"I worked for the Senator for twenty-five years," Harrison said. "And the last three for you. Your father was a fine man."

"Yes," I said. "I've heard that for a long time."

He kept his eyes on me. "Your father trusted me completely. He let me run this newspaper without any interference."

"Have I twisted your arm?"

"No. But I'm sensitive and I get the feeling that you might, should you happen to suddenly get interested in this newspaper. I'm too much of a tired grandfather to quit now and get another job."

"I'm leaving for the day," I said.

He puffed his pipe. "I wish I could do that. It must be nice to have money."

It was a half hour drive along the lake shore and north. I went through the gates and up the curv-

ing driveway to the house that had been in our family four generations. I recognized the black Cadillac parked in front.

Brager was in the library mixing himself a drink.

"If you don't find my liquor cabinet versatile enough," I said, "I'd be delighted to run to the nearest tavern and fetch a bucket of beer for you."

His grin showed big teeth clenched on the cigar. "You're polite, as usual."

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing in particular. Occasionally I just like to look over some of the things I'm paying for. My real and human properties." He poured a double shot of brandy. "And don't tell me to worry about the servants again. I know they might do talking about us among themselves, but that's as far as it would go. They've been with the family so long, they're more worried about its reputation than you are."

He moved to the portrait of my father and lifted his glass in a toast. "The good Senator. He served the nation faithfully and honestly for thirty years and dipped into his capital in order to be able to do it." He indicated my grandfather's portrait. "And the worthy ambassador. Also a man of unquestioned honor and integrity and a royal spender in the major cities of Europe. He financed that with the family capital too."

Brager's heavy body stopped un-

der the smaller painting of my great-grandfather. "And here's the spade-bearded you-know-what who made it all possible. The old-fashioned nineteenth century tiger who clawed his way into the millions."

"Yes," I said. "A favorite of mine."

Brager looked at me and grinned. "The family fortune didn't amount to much by the time you got hold of it, and you weren't bred to be poor."

"I find it uncomfortable. Why this recapitulation?"

"I caught you just in time. You were down to your last ounce of credit. Practically a pauper."

I went to the sideboard and made myself a drink.

Brager savored his brandy. "We're going far, you and me. You've got the spotless reputation and background and I've got the money to finance you and the organization to get you rolling."

I added ice cubes to my glass. "What do you eventually want?" I asked dryly. "The Postmastership?"

He grinned. "I might at that. I've been thinking of cleaning up my public name. Ten or fifteen years from now there won't be too much eyebrow raising if I'm seen walking next to you."

"You've got a big stable-cleaning job to do."

He nodded amiably. "You're so right. Maybe I'll start with the Sheriff's Department. Make it a shining model for the whole country to

admire." He sighed. "I feel kind of sentimental about the department. I got my start there, but now it's only chicken feed in my operations. I'm a rich man now, boy. One of the richest in the state."

His shrewd half-buried eyes watched me. "It wasn't an accident about me finding you. I was prospecting for a puppet and you were my strike. I watched you for years before I moved."

His laugh came from deep inside. He was enjoying this too much to stop. "You got rid of everything that could be turned into money and then you started on the newspaper. You must have thought you were selling the stock to fifty different men, but all the names were me."

"Now I own you, boy," he said. "Every last aristocratic bone. I've got you on a leash, and when I pull you've got to follow. Nobody knows that but you and me and I want to keep it that way. I even let you print the nasty stuff about me. It gives me a kick and keeps the good public from seeing that we got fingers in the same glove."

"Don't give me credit for the editorials," I said. "My editor is the crusader."

Brager regarded me critically. "In a way you ought to be thankful. Until I got hold of you, you were a nobody with famous ancestors. No one outside of that little circle you breathe in ever heard of you before. You had no ambition and you were

going nowhere. Now you're on the train, boy."

He shook his head. "I just don't understand you. The only reason you want money is so you can lead a certain type of life. Don't you want position and power?"

"It wouldn't be my power," I said. "And besides, I detest grubbing for it among people who sweat."

He thought about that and the body laugh came again. "And I get a kick out of it. It's blood, meat, and air to me."

I finished my drink and put down the glass. "I was wondering how you would take to the idea of having me as a son-in-law?"

His eyes narrowed. "What do you mean by that?"

I smiled. "Just a thought. Since we are evidently due for a long association, I had the idea that it might be amusing to make it a family affair. Why don't you introduce me to your daughter?"

His face splotched with anger. "If I ever see you near her, I'll kill you."

I raised an eyebrow. "How protective. But why? Wouldn't you want her to be the wife of a governor, a senator, or more?"

He glared at me. "I want her to be happy. That's what I want. And she wouldn't have a chance to be happy with you. You might look like a clean white God to everybody else, but I know what's really inside that hide of yours. There's

only one person you give a damn about, and that's yourself."

I nodded. "Possibly you're right. And then there's also the fact that my entire brilliant political career would be jeopardized by such an obvious alliance."

I watched him pick up his hat. "I could use another five thousand," I said.

His eyes flicked over me. "You spend money like water. All right, I'll get cash and mail it tomorrow. But it'll be a thousand. Not five." He scowled. "Sometimes I wonder who's got who on the hook."

The phone rang a half hour after he left. It was Ellen Brager again.

"Yes," I said. "I haven't forgotten. But I have to appear at several meetings tonight. I'll try to get away before ten."

I met her in the same small family restaurant in the Third Ward. As usual, she had the table at the rear and near the kitchen. She was just over twenty-one, somewhat plain, and fifteen pounds heavier than the accepted fashion. I reflected once again that as far as intelligence went, she must have taken after her mother. The shrewd light in her father's eyes was but a dim reflection in hers.

"I've already ordered," she said. "I suppose I should have waited and let you do that, but they stop taking orders at ten. I wanted to make sure we had something to eat. I'm hungry."

"Of course, first things first."

"I hope you like fried chicken?"

I repressed a shudder. "Haven't I always?"

The proprietor brought us two steins of beer. He beamed. "Nice night. Ain't that right, Mister?"

"Lovely," I said. "Absolutely lovely."

After he went away, Ellen took a sip of her beer and then leaned forward, her chin in one hand. "You know what I'm thinking?"

"Not at this particular moment."

"I'm thinking of how it was such a coincidence that we met."

"Yes," I said. "A remarkable coincidence. Perhaps fate brought us together."

She nodded eagerly. "That was it. Fate. I never thought I'd meet anybody like you. Important, I mean, and society."

The fried chicken was brought to us and put down on the checkered tablecloth.

After a while, Ellen paused in her eating. "There are so many things I don't know yet about good manners in public, but I'm learning. I'm reading books and I've just hired Mrs. Jackson to teach me. She's real society too. She says she's giving me lessons as a hobby and contributing the money to charity, but personally I don't know. Her clothes ain't so new."

The name Jackson was completely unfamiliar to me.

Ellen touched her hair. "How do I look. Not too flashy?"

"A bit too much jewelry," I said.

"But it's real."

"No doubt, my dear. But that isn't the point."

"I want you to be proud of me some day."

I sipped the beer. "I'm proud of you right now, of course."

She sighed. "It's like Romeo and Juliet. Us two, I mean. Their families were enemies too. You have all those editorials in your paper about my father and here we are in love." She giggled slightly.

I wiped my fingertips with a paper napkin and then patted her hand.

Her face became serious. "Father's really a sweet kind of person."

"Some day I hope very much to meet him."

She shook her head. "But not now. I know what it would do to your political career if you were even seen with my father or even with me. And getting married to me right away would absolutely ruin it. That's why we have to meet like this. Secluded, I mean. For the time being."

I thought the chicken was underdone. "But, my dear," I said. "My career means absolutely nothing to me."

She smiled with superior feminine wisdom. "I appreciate you saying that, Roger, but one of us has to be practical. I know you probably believe that right now, but in later years you'll be sorry. I know you'll never say anything about it, but I'll be able to tell."

I patted her hand again.

She sighed. "If it were only simple like us running away and getting married. If only there was no politics. Then even if for some reason father wouldn't approve and should cut me off without a cent, it wouldn't matter because you've got plenty of money anyway."

"I suppose you're right about everything," I said.

She nodded. "We've just got to be patient and wait a little while. Father doesn't tell me hardly anything about his work, but he did say that he wasn't going to run for sheriff any more. All we have to do is wait a couple of years and then everybody will have forgotten about him." Blind loyalty stiffened her chin. "Not that Father has ever done anything bad, but people talk."

I left her at eleven-thirty. It had been a long hour.

Renolds came to see me Wednesday afternoon.

He probably hadn't been sleeping too well and his voice was tense. "Have you made up your mind?"

I played with the stone paper weight for a moment and then looked up. "Your son was killed by Brager's car?"

His eyes flashed. "How did you find out?"

"That's unimportant," I said. "Brager wasn't held. It was an accident. The boy ran into the street

from between two parked cars. You're not the only one, you see, with a capacity for unearthing facts."

Renolds shook his head. "Brager was drunk and he was driving too fast. Much too fast."

"You were there and saw that?"

"No," he said tightly. "But I know it."

I selected a cigarette and thought over his scheme. The whole idea was ridiculous. And yet I felt a curiosity. I had to hear it. Perhaps it would help me. If it didn't, I could always back out. "I've decided to help you," I said finally. "It's up to honest citizens to get rid of Brager. One way or another."

He leaned forward eagerly. "All that you actually have to do is disappear for three days. No one must know where you are or even that you planned to go away. When you return, you simply explain that it was a sudden impulse on your part. You wanted to get away from the strain of campaigning for a few days."

"All right," I said. "And what will you be doing?"

He smiled grimly. "At about eleven tonight I'll appear at the sheriff's office. I will be disheveled and my clothes will be blood-stained. I will confess to having murdered you."

He let me think about that and then went on. "When the sheriff's men investigate, they'll find plenty of evidence to corroborate my story.

There will be blood stains all over the furniture in this room and they'll find the supposed murder weapon lying here with my fingerprints on it."

"But no body," I reminded him.

Renolds shrugged that aside. "I'll tell them I dumped it into the river. They'll drag for it, of course, and they won't find it. But they'll expect it to be discovered farther down the river. All we need however is a few days for them to make fools of themselves."

The whole thing is thin, I thought. So many things could go wrong. "And what would be your motive for killing me?"

"That's taken care of," he said. "I asked Harrison for a raise and he refused me. I knew he'd have to because I just had one a short time ago. But I'll tell the sheriff's men that I got angry and decided to go directly to you. We had an argument about it and you fired me. I lost my head and killed you."

It wouldn't work, I thought. But I saw something else and nodded. "It sounds all right to me."

"Yes," he said. "The details aren't too important."

But they are, I thought. They're the key to this whole thing.

"I'll be back here tonight at ten-thirty," Renolds said. "And we can make the final preparations."

I had three speeches scheduled for the night, but I managed to get back to my office suite five minutes before Renolds arrived.

He put the zipper bag he was carrying on a chair and opened it. He removed an opaque bottle of approximately quart size. "This is blood."

I looked at it. "Human?"

He seemed shocked. "Of course not. Where could I get that?"

I smiled. "There are detectable differences between animal and human blood."

There was a trace of petulance in his voice. "The sheriff's deputies will have no reason to doubt it is human blood. Not after my confession. I doubt if the department even has the facilities to make a test."

Another supposition, I thought. I sighed. "Very well. I'll take your word for that."

His eyes went about the room. "We need a murder weapon."

I pointed to the twin set of pokers in the stand by the fireplace. "Those seem appropriate."

He pulled out one of them. "Yes. They're quite heavy."

"About this matter of your being bloody and disheveled," I said. "Don't you think that's a bit overdone? Wouldn't it be much better if you simply go to the sheriff's office as you are and make a quiet, calm confession?"

He looked at me. "Do you think that's enough?"

"Absolutely."

He studied the furniture. "Now I suppose we ought to disarrange things here so that it appears there was a struggle. And of course we'll

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have to spill some blood around."

"I'm going to have to remain here for another hour at least," I said. "There are a few things I must absolutely take care of before I can leave for a few days."

He seemed about to protest.

I held up a hand. "If we disturb the room now there's always the danger that someone might accidentally wander in here during the next hour and spoil our plan. A cleaning woman, perhaps."

I took the bottle from his hand. "But I see no reason why you must remain here until then. I'll take care of everything just before I leave."

I glanced at my watch. "In exactly one hour, you give yourself up."

He hesitated.

"I am entirely competent to take care of matters here," I said firmly. "I suggest that you take a quiet drive for an hour."

It was difficult to determine whether he was relieved or reluctant to go.

I phoned Brager five minutes after he left.

Brager came within twenty minutes. "What's so mysterious that you had to make me come to you?" he demanded. "If it's a scheme to get more money out of me, you're wasting your time."

I waited until he took a chair. "Does anyone know that I phoned?"

"Of course not," he snapped.

I leaned against a corner of my

desk. "You want power and I want money. That much is plain. I'm willing to get you that power, but the pay isn't sufficient and I don't like begging for money a bit at a time."

He grinned. "I'm crying about that."

"I require at least two hundred thousand a year," I said. "And that in regular installments."

Brager chuckled softly. "A man in the public eye can't be too big a spender. The voters don't like it. And don't be bitter about the little thousands I give you. They add up to fifty a year."

I folded my arms. "Then I may assume you intend to change nothing?"

"I like things just the way they are."

I sighed. "In that case I come to a second matter. I mentioned previously the possibility of a family alliance."

Anger flicked into his eyes. "You know what I said about that."

I picked up a sheaf of papers. "Then I move to subject number three. Look these over. You'll find them interesting."

He took the bundle and frowned at it. "What is this supposed to be?"

I moved to the fireplace. "Read and find out."

Brager's back was toward me. "This is just a financial report on the newspaper," he said. "And a year old at that."

"Turn to page twelve," I said. I

selected the poker which did not carry Renolds' prints.

Brager was still hunched over the report when I struck. He grunted as the iron bit into his skull, and pitched forward on his face.

I made sure that he was dead. Then I took the poker to the washstand in the next room and cleaned it. I returned it to the fireplace and with a handkerchief carefully removed its twin so as not to disturb Renolds' fingerprints. I smeared it with Brager's blood and put it on the floor beside his head.

I dimmed the lights, making the room almost dark and then put on my hat and topcoat. I slipped Renolds' bottle into my pocket and took the elevator to the floor below, where I knew there was an incinerator, and got rid of it.

Outside the building I walked to where I'd parked my car two blocks away and began the drive to my cabin in the mountains.

I could almost see the way things would happen.

Probably Earl Wittig, Brager's Chief Deputy, would be in charge of the case.

"It's peculiar," he would say. "First Renolds said that he killed you. When we investigated, we found it was actually Brager who was dead."

"Renolds admitted the murder?"

Wittig would look perplexed. "He changed his story to something wild, about you and him trying to frame Brager and the department."

"That's ridiculous," I would snap. "Why should I want to do something like that?"

Wittig's eyes would be guarded. "You and Brager weren't exactly bosom buddies."

If there were other people in the room. I would draw Wittig aside. "Do you believe everything you read in the newspapers?"

Wittig's face would show perplexity.

My voice would be low. "Brager's daughter and I intend to marry."

The information might take a few seconds to penetrate. Wittig's mouth would fall open slightly.

Perhaps I would wink. "Things aren't always what they seem on the surface, Wittig. I'm sure you understand that. Brager and I were actually the best of friends. But we thought it more . . . ah . . . convenient to keep that fact quiet. At least until after the election. You know what I mean?"

Wittig would break into an understanding chuckle. "I get it, Mr. Troy."

"I imagine that Brager probably came to see me and have a drink," I would say. "He often did that late at night when he could be sure we wouldn't be seen together. We would talk over business."

I would sigh. "Unfortunately for Brager I wasn't there, but Renolds was." I would be thoughtful for a few moments. "Perhaps it was dim in the office and Renolds actually thought he was killing me. Or is it

possible that he actually had a motive for killing Brager?"

"A good one," Wittig would say emphatically. "That and his fingerprints on the murder weapon ought to take him to the chair."

I would offer Wittig a cigar. "I suppose you're next in line for Brager's job?"

His eyes would light at the thought of it. "That's right. Somebody has to take his place."

"I hope we can be friends." I would smile. "In the same way Brager and I were."

Wittig would grin. "Why not?"

I arrived at the cabin at two-thirty in the morning and made a fire to drive out the dampness.

Ellen was alone now, I reflected as I watched the flaming logs. I doubted if it would be difficult to get her consent to marry me soon. At the most it might be a year.

I would probably still have to run for governor. If for no other reason, but to please her. I sighed at the thought of the remaining three weeks of the campaign.

I had no great desire to win the election. The governorship would be tedious.

When I married Ellen, I would take an immediate leave of absence. Perhaps we'd go to Africa. Yes, that was it. Then a hunting accident and the governor would resign his post and go to Europe to grieve and forget.

And live so well on his late wife's millions.

It was two days later when Wittig found me. I was sitting on the steps of the cabin cleaning my rifle.

"Mr. Roger Troy?" he asked.

I nodded.

He took the rifle out of my hands. "You're under arrest."

I smiled quizzically. "May I ask what in the world for?"

"For the murder of Sheriff Mike Brager. He was found dead in your office. We checked the prints on the murder weapon with Washington. They were identical to those taken when you were in the army during the war."

I burned my fingertips slightly when I ground out my cigarette. I looked up at Wittig. "What was the murder weapon?"

"You ought to know. A smooth stone paperweight."

The next words slipped out of me unintentionally. "What about Renolds?"

The name was strange to Wittig. "Who's he?"

I took a breath. "Nobody. Nobody at all."

"Would you care to make a statement?"

"No," I said. "Not until I see my lawyer."

But it was Renolds I really wanted to see.

I didn't know if he would actually come when I sent for him, but it may have been that he was curious to see what he'd done.

The guard brought him up to my cell door the next day. "Would you

like to be let inside, Mr. Renolds?" he asked.

Renolds shook his head. "No. This is far enough."

I waited until the guard moved down the corridor. "You became frightened and backed out? Isn't that right?" I demanded. "You came back to my office and framed me. You knew that my fingerprints would be on the paperweight."

He spoke quietly. "You tried to frame me too, didn't you, Mr. Troy?"

"I can drag you into this," I said harshly.

His mouth twitched slightly. "With some wild story? Are you planning an insanity plea?" He met my eyes. "You did murder him, didn't you?"

I glared and said nothing.

His mouth twitched again in what might have been a smile. "I just wanted to be sure. There was a remote possibility that it could have been someone else."

"I had no motive," I snapped.

"Perhaps one will be found." There was no question about the smile now. "I understand you are being thoroughly investigated as a result of several anonymous tips."

"They'll be able to determine

that the murder weapon was a poker. Not the paperweight."

There was amusement in his eyes. "If the murderer had been content to strike only once or twice, that might have been possible. But Brager's skull was completely smashed. Perhaps by a dozen blows."

But that wasn't the way I'd left Brager.

The note of desperation in my voice startled me. "If I'd killed him, I wouldn't have left him in my office. I would have disposed of the body."

Renolds smiled. "You got panicky and ran away." He watched my face. "I wanted Brager to be dead and that's what happened. Things couldn't have worked out finer if I'd planned them that way."

My eyes widened.

Renolds touched the brim of his hat with a forefinger. "Goodbye, Mr. Troy. At least now you can stop worrying about being poor."

I stared at him. "How did you know about that?"

Renolds smiled.

I gripped the bars. "How did you know about that?" I demanded again.

But he was walking away.

